

Masthead Logo

## The Qualitative Report

Volume 16 | Number 6

Article 4

11-1-2011

# From Tactics to Praxis: Learning Feminist Pedagogy through Methodology

Laura L. Janik-Marusov

*University of Northern Iowa*, [laura.janik@uni.edu](mailto:laura.janik@uni.edu)

Lauren M. Sardi

*Quinnipiac University*, [lauren.sardi@quinnipiac.edu](mailto:lauren.sardi@quinnipiac.edu)

Dina Giovanelli

*Monroe Community College*, [dinagiovanelli@yahoo.com](mailto:dinagiovanelli@yahoo.com)

Rita Offiaeli

*University of Connecticut*, [rita.offiaeli@uconn.edu](mailto:rita.offiaeli@uconn.edu)

Deric Shannon

*University of Connecticut*, [propaganarchy@hotmail.com](mailto:propaganarchy@hotmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

### Recommended APA Citation

Janik-Marusov, L. L., Sardi, L. M., Giovanelli, D., Offiaeli, R., & Shannon, D. (2011). From Tactics to Praxis: Learning Feminist Pedagogy through Methodology. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(6), 1517-1539. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol16/iss6/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

# From Tactics to Praxis: Learning Feminist Pedagogy through Methodology

## Abstract

Through a self-reflexive and ongoing process, in this paper we chronicle how we as graduate students learned about feminist pedagogy through methodology. Primarily, we noted dilemmas in feminist methodology that became central dilemmas for us in our roles as feminist research guides within a combined graduate and undergraduate feminist methodologies course. As we became aware of these specific dilemmas, not only did we attempt to apply them to the research we were conducting for an institutional ethnographic research project on campus safety, but we also found them to be central pedagogical concerns in ways that were both unique and similar to each individual graduate student. Our analysis focuses on the insider/outsider dilemma, self-reflection, and multiple subjectivities in the hopes that we can share our experiences of what became a vital and unique learning experience.

## Keywords

Dual Positionality, Feminist Pedagogy, Insider/Outsider Dilemma, Multiple Subjectivities, Self Reflection

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

## **From Tactics to Praxis: Learning Feminist Pedagogy through Methodology**

Laura L. Janik-Marusov  
University of Northern Iowa, Iowa, USA

Lauren M. Sardi  
Quinnipiac University, Connecticut, USA

Dina Giovanelli  
Monroe Community College, New York, USA

Rita Offiaeli and Deric Shannon  
University of Connecticut, Connecticut, USA

---

*Through a self-reflexive and ongoing process, in this paper we chronicle how we as graduate students learned about feminist pedagogy through methodology. Primarily, we noted dilemmas in feminist methodology that became central dilemmas for us in our roles as feminist research guides within a combined graduate and undergraduate feminist methodologies course. As we became aware of these specific dilemmas, not only did we attempt to apply them to the research we were conducting for an institutional ethnographic research project on campus safety, but we also found them to be central pedagogical concerns in ways that were both unique and similar to each individual graduate student. Our analysis focuses on the insider/outsider dilemma, self-reflection, and multiple subjectivities in the hopes that we can share our experiences of what became a vital and unique learning experience. Key Words: Dual Positionality, Feminist Pedagogy, Insider/Outsider Dilemma, Multiple Subjectivities, Self Reflection.*

---

In the fall of 2006, the authors of this manuscript: Laura, Lauren, Rita, Deric, and Dina were graduate students from the same university occupying various stages in their Ph.D. careers and coming from diverse disciplines: Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. Collectively, we registered for a course on feminist methodology, a course designed for undergraduate and graduate students alike. The goal of the class was to learn feminist methodology through practice; and thus, based on the interests that many students in this course shared, we engaged in a study of safety on campus using Smith's (1987) method of Institutional Ethnography as she describes in *The Everyday World as Problematic*. This process involved asking a number of questions, such as: what is safety, how do we as students define it, how does the University administration define it, who do people view as safe and threatening, how does the campus define safety and danger, and where on campus does one feel safe? Therefore, while the substantive topic we covered was campus safety, the learning objective of the course was to understand feminist methodologies and praxis. The purpose of this article is to reflect on our experiences as

graduate students in a feminist research methods course and to demonstrate ways in which we faced particular dilemmas inside and outside of the classroom environment. We believe that the various ways in which we encountered and worked through these issues positively affected the classroom environment and the ways in which we thought of ourselves as both feminist students and teachers. Our intention is to add to the existing literature on feminist methodology and pedagogy in the classroom. In this vein, we discuss the various ways in which we developed pedagogical insight and negotiated a number of difficulties that emerged in the classroom that will be useful to a variety of individuals who are working not only in academia, but those who are conducting their own qualitative research as well.

Notably, the overall analysis and discussion of the dilemmas that we articulate below occurred during and directly after the course was taking place. We were all graduate students four years ago at the time these experiences and write-up took place, and we have taken our reflections in this article directly from the original writings we produced during that time. While it is undeniable that over time, our reflections become colored by newer experiences, we have attempted to retain a discussion of as much of the original processes taking place by adhering to the written products we retained from this experience. However, because time has passed since we faced these dilemmas in the classroom, we have no doubt that further reflection through continued revision of this article has continued to shape the ways in which we perceived our original experiences and can serve to enhance our analysis in this writing.

By the end of our course, our unique, acquired positions as both students and feminist research guides/teachers within the same class, a point that will be explained more thoroughly momentarily, allowed us to learn feminist pedagogy through feminist practice and methodological engagement. We were simultaneously outsiders looking in and insiders looking out, as we were both teachers and students. Consequently, we learned a great deal about pedagogy and class instruction in a course that was designed to teach us feminist methodology. While the end product that our class generated was both interesting and timely, our safety ethnography is not the focus of our current analysis. Rather, we will extrapolate upon the lessons we learned from our distinctive positions as quasi-instructors and students in the same class. Before doing this, however, a brief explanation of how we came to occupy our unique teacher/student positions is in order.

### **Methodology and Class Structure**

In the fall of 2006, approximately 20 students at the University enrolled in a Women's Studies Research Methods class. Notably, the course was not diverse in terms of race or gender. With the exception of one male graduate student and one female African student, all other students were female and white. The majority of students enrolled were undergraduate Women's Studies majors, and there were five graduate students who were also taking the class.

Structurally, the class was such that the professor would lecture for about one hour per week, and after lecture, we would split into groups to discuss research strategies, assignments, and, later in the course, readings that were assigned to the class. In order to achieve graduate credit for the course, we, the five graduate students at the time, were assigned additional class duties. Namely, the professor placed each of us in charge of a

specific undergraduate group of students from class. We will momentarily discuss the purpose of each of these groups as they relate to learning about feminist methodology.

For the entirety of the course, each undergraduate and graduate student was instructed to keep a journal. This journal functioned as a sort of quasi-field notebook, with notes not quite as thickly written as ethnographic field notes, but with reflections on the course, readings, and interactions with students (as well as dilemmas encountered in those areas) written about with more depth and reflection than a typical diary. Thus, as we collected our experiences, we also tried to be helpful feminist guides to the undergraduates we were assisting, and we also attempted to keep a detailed record of the ongoing process.

Thus, the evidence we use in the pages that follow stems from a variety of sources including: quasi-field notebooks, undergraduate-graduate group discussions, graduate group discussions, and trouble-shooting discussions between the professor and graduate students. Collectively, these sources colored our understanding of feminist pedagogy, methodological engagement, and praxis.

As we reflect on our decision to construct this narrative and share with readers our experiences as being teachers and students simultaneously, we acknowledge how difficult it is to ensure that everyone's voice—undergraduate and graduate—comes through. The undergraduate students in the course did not have a direct say in what went into (or remained out of) this paper. In other words, they did not have the chance to *directly* talk back. However, throughout the duration of the course we certainly tapped into the experiences and thoughts that the undergraduates expressed, through in-class and out of class meetings and conversations. We have attempted to convey, where possible, these insights. Further, undergraduate students were encouraged to speak with the professor about any problems they experienced with their graduate group leaders. These insights were then anonymously reported back to the graduate students by the professor. In short, the undergraduate students in the course *indirectly* talked back and informed our current narrative. They were aware that we were writing a paper based on our experiences in the course. As well, the undergraduate students knew that their names would never be used. All names of students and participants in this paper are pseudonyms. Our class also received IRB approval to conduct research and complete written analysis of the data generated from our substantive study as well as from the insights we obtained as graduate students in the class.

### **Purpose**

In this paper, we hope to shed light on some of the strategies we devised to overcome the classroom dilemmas we experienced. Our engagement with institutional ethnography placed us in a position whereby we were asked to be students and quasi-instructors simultaneously. The dilemmas we encountered, and the solutions we devised to overcome these predicaments, spilled over into the classroom and had a positive impact on how we approached teaching. They are insights we continue to draw on years later. We feel that the pedagogical insights we developed will be of interest to graduate students who act as teaching assistants, newly minted Ph.Ds beginning their research and teaching careers, qualitative researchers who are frequently required to take on multiple, conflicting roles concurrently, as well as academics that may be teaching a new

preparation. While feminist and qualitative researchers have highlighted some of the difficulties associated with conducting institutional ethnography and dual positionality in the research setting (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Naples, 2003; Naples & Bojar, 2002; Sprague, 2005; Wolfe, 1996), we hope to take these insights one step further and demonstrate how these dilemmas can have positive implications for classroom pedagogy as they relate to: diversifying classroom curricula, managing classroom discussion and group exercises, maintaining classroom professionalism, pedagogical accountability, and student advising.

The results of our institutional ethnography are not at the heart of this analysis; however, it is still important to understand what institutional ethnography entails to better understand how our engagement with this type of feminist methodology generated a number of obstacles, including our dual positionality in the classroom, that we were forced to tackle in order to successfully complete the course. Many of the strategies we employed spilled over into the classroom setting and informed our approach to teaching. Thus, what follows is a brief description of the feminist theory and methodology we used in this course, the reasoning behind our decision to break into a number of different groups headed by graduate students, the purpose of each of these specific groups, and finally, how these experiences led to a number of dilemmas in the classroom. As Smith (2005) writes:

The aim of the sociology we call “institutional ethnography” is to *reorganize the social relations of knowledge of the social* so that people can take that knowledge up as an extension of our ordinary knowledge of the local actualities of our lives. It is a method of inquiry into the social that proposes to enlarge the scope of what becomes visible from that site, mapping the relations that connect one local site to others. Like a map, it aims to be through and through indexical to the local sites of people’s experience, making visible how we are connected into the extended social relations of ruling and economy and their intersections. (p. 29)

In other words, to understand “ruling relations” from the standpoint of those we wish to study, we must “map out” how we believe different institutions are organized and how they create discourses and texts which affect the “safe or unsafe” (pp. 29-30) experiences students have on campus (Naples, 2003). Because it is possible to expose these ruling relations, we can also describe ways in which these processes can be negotiated. This process lends itself to the very type of feminist activist research and learning we hoped to achieve. Ultimately, it was our experiences conducting this substantive research that brought a number of dilemmas to the surface and allowed us the ability to navigate each of these issues throughout the course. Because institutional ethnographers examine the ways in which relations of ruling are apparent in “the production of texts used to organize people’s activities in various locations such as schools or government agencies...” (Naples, 2003, p. 29), we studied multiple locations, texts, and discourses relevant to the study of campus safety. Thus, we not only had to come to an understanding of what exactly the term “safety” meant to us as researchers, but we also had to understand how others (both individually and in groups) defined the concept and how it affected them.

We believed that the best course of action to accomplish our goals would be to study safety on campus on a variety of institutional levels. In essence, this type of approach would produce a “map” to direct us toward a form of knowledge of the social “that show[ed] relations between various and differentiated local sites of experiences without subsuming or displacing them” (Smith, 1987, cited in Naples, 2003, p. 30). Our first task as graduate students was to understand how the intersection of these different levels of ruling relations could be teased apart and studied by different groups within the same class. Collectively, we decided to study five levels of campus safety after receiving IRB approval. We spent one entire class hashing out these levels and each student had a say in what to include or not include, which the instructor ultimately agreed with. Each graduate student chose a particular level that we were interested in and would be in charge of. Next, the undergraduate students selected a level they wanted to pursue further. At most, each graduate student was in charge of five undergraduates who were associated with their chosen level. What follows is a brief description of the research questions each group set out to answer during the course of the semester. Again, while the purpose is not to highlight or expand upon the substantive research, it is important to foreground this information so that we can link the learning processes that were occurring in the class to the ways in which we as graduate students handled the ensuing dilemmas.

The first level was the *individual/psychological level*, which asked questions such as: How does safety work? What counts as safety? Are there differences in safety levels among students? How is safety different among people? What are the constituencies?

The second level was the *interpersonal level*, which asked questions such as: What constitutes a safe space? What are the different constituencies for each site? This level also focused on student-initiated groups on campus, rather than on the sites or groups that were initiated by the university, government officials, and/or non-students.

The third level was the *institutional level*, which asked: What are the institutional sites responsible for safety? Are there spheres of organizations that are responsible for such issues? We thought that places such as residence halls, the police and parking stations, and especially counseling centers (all places which are university-run) were acceptable places to focus on for this level.

The fourth and fifth levels dealt with *public policy*, and the students working within these two levels asked the following questions: What policies exist regarding safety? Who makes or changes policy? Are there any documented problems and/or resolutions? Are these policies sufficient? Public policy itself was divided into two sections; the first dealt with policy on a *university level* and the second dealt with policy on a *state or national level*. Economic and political considerations were also taken into account within these two levels and students were encouraged to question if there were any sanctions in place for those who violated public policy on any of these levels as well.

As previously stated, we were given supervisory roles with the undergraduate students in this class. These additional “supervisory” tasks included: leading the group we were assigned to, looking over student journals, reporting back to the professor any in-group problems or issues, and guiding students through required class readings. These additional tasks contributed to our grade as graduate students in a predominately undergraduate course. Thus, while the focus of the course was on feminist methodology, given the supervisory nature of our roles within the class, we also began a “trial by fire” process in feminist pedagogy.

What was immediately striking (and not surprising) to us was the similarity in goals and foci of both feminist methodology and feminist pedagogy. For example, in her review of feminism's impact on education, Sandell (1991) notes that feminist educators, in response to a raised consciousness about women's issues in the 1970s, began "questioning assumptions related to gender-bias in society that were being reinforced through institutional premises and practices of the school" (p. 179). Likewise, Briskin and Coulter (1992) write that "(f)eminism recognizes education both as a site for struggle and as a tool for change-making" (p. 249). Echoing Sandell's sentiment, Wolfe (1996) writes that "(r)ecently, feminists have begun to turn the academic lens upon themselves, examining the power relations in which they are involved as researchers" (p. ix). DeVault (1990) mirrors Briskin and Coulter's (1992) sentiments when she states that "the dilemma for the feminist scholar, always, is to find ways of working within some disciplinary tradition while aiming at an intellectual revolution that will transform the tradition" (p. 96).

Thus, because feminist pedagogy and methodology both spring from the same source (feminist theory), these echoing sentiments are common. Our task, then, was to take what we were learning about feminist methodology and put it into pedagogical practice. Often, we found that the same dilemmas cited in works on feminist methodology were central pedagogical concerns for us as well. In the following sections, we will expand on the individual experiences we shared in this class and demonstrate how our engagement with methodology aided us in becoming better teachers and supervisors.

### **Issues of Dominance, Power, and Autonomy**

Extending what we learned in this course to a theory of pedagogy became a particular concern for us from the outset. In reading the first entry in Deric's journal, one can see the connections he draws between what we were doing in the course and how we were instructing the undergraduate students. Currents of feminist thought ran through Deric's journal notes as he used critical self-reflection to consider issues of dominance, power, and autonomy in his role as a group leader. This piece from the first entry in his journal highlights these concepts well:

I met with my group for the first time today... At the outset, it seemed like Donna has a tendency to sometimes dominate the conversations (at least with only the three of us here). As a result, I've structured further group meetings so that we report back to each other one at a time—that way everyone has a chance to talk about what they are doing in the future and we have limited time, so we have to move on at some point. It's kind of funny, watching and managing this process, while at the same time I reflect on being a student in similar situations. Most of us have issues that we are passionate about or that we are interested in more than others. Oftentimes, the conversation feels a lot more secure when it rests comfortably within those areas. How often do I try to steer discussions in comfortable directions for me? How many times do I dominate the floor and talk without listening? How far does self-reflection really go when



trying to adjust those behaviors and how often do we engage in them without ever realizing that we are?

These are interesting pedagogical questions, too. How do these kinds of questions differ for teachers (or in my case, in this class, as research coordinators)? During this session, I've tried to mostly sit back and comment briefly on what they want to do and maintain the right level of analysis. After making suggestions of research assignments/agendas, I've asked the other two group members if they seem reasonable and fair. I tried to shape my suggestions around the interests that they outlined in their introductory cards and asked for suggestions and feedback so that the decision-making process was a collective one (and decentralized inasmuch as it can be). I try my best, though, to listen more, talk less, and watch how autonomy can work well—especially in small groups.

As constant threads running through feminist literature and methodology, power, autonomy, egalitarian ethos, and self-reflection became central concerns to us as we attempted to be effective feminist guides for the undergraduates that we were responsible for assisting during the course of the semester.

We soon became aware of dilemmas in feminist methodology that became central dilemmas for us in our roles as feminist research guides. As we became attuned to these specific dilemmas, not only did we attempt to apply them to the work that we were doing for our research project, but we also found them to be central pedagogical concerns in ways that were both unique to each individual graduate student and similar as well. In encountering these dilemmas, we were forced to grapple with solutions and troubleshoot. For example, in regards to “steering the conversation,” it was important for us, as teachers, to understand that attempts to steer class conversation in one particular direction may not be a sign of student egoism. Instead, “steering” should be a signal to the teacher that either the student was not comfortable with the current conversation, perhaps due to personal reasons, or because we, the teacher, did not adequately explain the material under consideration. In the next section, Rita discusses her role in the class at the intersection of her race, gender, and parental status, and how this combination of roles influenced her perceptions of the course.

### **The Insider/Outsider Dilemma: Learning from the Margins**

Rita noted that at the onset of the class she defined herself as female, a Nigerian American, mother of four young children, and an older student returning to the world of academia after a fifteen year absence. By the end of that semester, she had redefined herself as a black Nigerian American female, mother of four young children, and an older student returning to academia after a fifteen year absence. This self-redefinition by the end of that semester resulted from her experience with feminist methodology and pedagogy and was important to her because it brought to the forefront how individuals that are multiply-positioned within a context may need to analyze and reflect on the most marginalized of their positions in order to conduct critical research more effectively.

Why did this subtle, but personally important, shift in her self-identification occur? She attempted to explain this change in definition by examining her learning

experience through the unique pedagogical approach adopted for this course, and by looking at the composition of the class and the course structure. In so doing, she delved into how she was positioned not as an “insider” or “outsider,” but rather as being on the “periphery” of both the “inside” and “outside” simultaneously. As Rita wrote in her journal:

I also have to note the uniqueness of my being black within the class. Not only am I black, but I was also born in Nigeria and spent the first seventeen years of my life there, so to a great extent my cultural context is not the same as that of a typical African American; I grew up in a culture without racial dichotomies but with a gender dichotomy, and this primarily accounts for my initial positioning first as female, then as black. I have since begun to re-orient myself to, first, being black, then female.

The class was composed of about 20 students (the majority of whom were white females); one white male graduate student, and one black female graduate student. Rita noted that she did not feel differently from any of the students initially, but as our coursework touched on the sensitive issues of race and marginalized groups, she could not help but feel marginalized and looked upon as an outsider—not because of anyone’s direct attitude or behavior towards her, but because she was the only obvious black person in the class. Thus, as Sprague (2005) writes: “differences and similarities in gender, race, class, and other salient dimensions of social power and privilege have an impact on interactions within the context of research,” (p. 124) which also determines how people interact with each other across different situations and positions.

Rita was the project leader of the “institutional level” research group and paired with three female undergraduate students. Given the multiple facets and structure of the class, Wolfe’s (1996) description of Haraway’s (1991) “politics of epistemology and location” can clearly be utilized to describe her positioning within the group:

This politics and epistemology is based on situating, location, and positioning, “where partiality and not universality” is the basis for knowledge claims. *Situated knowledges* are *marked knowledges* that produce “maps of consciousness” reflecting the various categories of gender, class, race, and nationality of the researcher. (Wolfe, 1996, p. 14)

These knowledges reflected our locationality (historical, national, generational) and positionality (race, gender, class, nationality, sexuality), acknowledging how the dynamics of where we are always affects our viewpoint and the production of knowledge. Concerning her status within her group, Rita wrote:

There were instances when I felt just like the rest of the undergraduate students in my team, with the same types of concerns and anxieties about making good grades in the course, completing assigned tasks, and working together as a team. However, even at these times that I felt like an insider, my role as project leader pitched me towards the periphery. The course requirement that I evaluate team member’s performances on certain tasks

and provide feedback that would affect their grades to the professor resulted in a power differential. As such, even though we had the same types of concerns, this power differential left me on the margins of the inside. I felt I could not really be “just” one of them. The undergraduate students felt I had power over them; the power to judge their work, thus I was to be treated differently at times. I felt they viewed me with caution and suspicion because I had to provide feedback that could affect their grades to the professor.

Rita felt that her group members viewed her as an “outsider,” not a total outsider, but one who could not be fully welcomed to the “inside” because of the power differential: one which was exacerbated by her being much older than them, and of a different cultural background.

Rita also noted that because she felt like an insider, albeit a peripheral one, she became conflicted about providing feedback to the professor regarding group members’ progress on the project. All of us, including Rita, felt that because we were fellow students and could empathize and relate to their worries, it almost amounted to a certain degree of betrayal to provide feedback about them, especially if it were negative. This conflicting emotion is common among female researchers as described by Wolfe (1996):

At the same time... a shared positionality can potentially bring with it another way of understanding, seeing, listening... It is also very possible that such a position may make it difficult for the researcher to “air the dirty laundry” due to her bonds and allegiances. (p. 18)

An excerpt from Rita’s journal describes her struggles with her shared positionality:

One of my team members approached me and asked if I thought her diary was too short. She said she wanted to know because my feedback to her had been that it was good enough, and she was doing a good job. I told her that at the time of my review, I was not aware of the “10 pages double spaced minimum requirement,” thus my feedback to her. I am not sure what prompted her asking this question, but I felt very uncomfortable. I feel like my feedback was valid, given that I had no baseline or parameters to measure against. It was to be totally subjective and so it was. I do feel like I let my team members down and may actually have gotten them into trouble when that was farthest from my mind. I am sort of glad that the close team relationship on this project is over with. I felt like I was leading without the proper tools. I am not exactly sure how to put it, maybe we should have been just called project facilitators as opposed to leaders, because leader has power connotations and I had no power whatsoever over team members nor did I desire power over them. It seemed like the team members saw the graduate students as having a lot of power over them. It was just an awkward type of relationship most of the time. They looked to me for leadership, but I felt like I was just a figure head and actually was their equal in all we did. I am a black female, back in school

after over 15 years of absence and still just trying to adjust to the new ways things are now done in school, and first week of classes I am asked to lead a group of white females in research. I am not to tell them what to do, they decide what task to work on and are responsible for completing their tasks, but I report back on their progress. I sometimes felt I was spying on them. I thought it was a good idea on paper; however, in practice I am uncomfortable with it.

In addition, we felt that we played the role of participant-observer in our groups. As a participant, we walked alongside our team members on tasks. As observers, we documented not just the project process but also the progress of team members. As we participated, we were cautiously viewed as insiders by team members and we tentatively felt like insiders because we had common objectives. As we observed and made progress reports, though, we felt we were viewed as outsiders by team members, and we also felt like outsiders.

In other words, we did not have to leave the classroom to experience the insider/outsider dilemma and issues of power and ruling; additionally, in filling in the professor on group members' performances we affected our undergraduate teammates' grades and this process not only determined their behavior towards us as graduate students/team leaders, but it also dictated how we were to interact with team members. Before coming up with an interview schedule and actually conducting an interview as part of the project, we were already experiencing feminist research dilemmas in the classroom environment.

As Rita struggled with her multiple positions within the class structure, she faced the dilemma of representative sampling of research participants within a university that is not very diverse in numerous ways. This dilemma was exemplified by the difficulties the class experienced in trying to set up personal interviews with African Americans; towards the end of the interview process, we found we had not interviewed any African Americans at all. This was not for lack of trying; the organizations that we had hoped would provide access to the black student body were slow in responding to our requests, as we will later discuss. Being a black person, Rita took it upon herself to find African or African American students on campus to interview so they would also be represented within our research. Rita easily was able to arrange interviews with black students on campus because she knew one other black student who agreed to be interviewed, and she also arranged for dialogues with two other black students. As Rita wrote:

Right away, I realized this was an example of how being an insider facilitates access to interview subjects and that I should have factored this into my role in the project at the onset and not almost as an after-thought. In other words, if at the onset of the class I had posited myself as a black female, I would have been more focused on making sure that African Americans were represented in the research process and thus my conscious repositioning of myself first as black then female. Prior to this experience, due to my cultural context, I had always seen myself as a female who is black, but to conduct "my" critical feminist research, I realize I have to reposition myself as a black person who is female.

Rita's self-identification was not only essential in how she framed her positionality within the class and within her particular group, but it was also important that she understood her insider status through a self-reflective process in which she realized that her identity would be useful in gaining access to particular groups of students on campus.

One of the dilemmas of feminist pedagogy is to address the issue of how to effectively teach and learn given our diversity. Looking back, it seemed a critical engagement, early on in the process, with the "text" that ruled and "mapped out" social relations throughout the semester could have mitigated some of the issues we encountered. Teaching feminist research implied a "critique" of research methods in such a manner that we could critically critique the positioning of the researcher and researched in order to identify the different issues encountered by those on the inside or outside and the margins of both areas as well. Looking back on the insider/outsider dilemma faced by Rita, one could walk away with the lesson that a classroom discussion, at the onset of the semester, focused on a critical analysis of the "ruling text," which in this case was the "course outline and requirements." Doing so would have alleviated some of the tensions and concerns inherent in the graduate/undergraduate (leader/led) relationship. It seemed that an exercise in which students were assigned the critique of the text that ruled relations in the class would have been worthwhile, given that the course itself was focused on the role of "text" in mapping social relations within institutions. For example, there could have been a more in-depth critical examination of role definitions, relationships, and expectations beyond the course outline overview in which students were encouraged to ask questions about course requirements and deadlines. While we could have discussed these issues with the professor throughout the semester, these "ruling relations" and power imbalances were so embedded within our own consciousness that it did not occur to any of us at the time to speak with her about these particular dilemmas we faced.

Integral to institutional ethnography is an examination of texts, which allowed us to come to an understanding of their effects on the researchers as well as the researched. In the same vein, it becomes critical in feminist pedagogy to understand how those that comprise the learning environment (i.e., students, professors) who are differently or multiply positioned (inside, outside, or on the margins) view pedagogy and the effects of different approaches on them. In our case, Rita was not just able to reposition herself but to step outside of her defined role, which confined her list of potential interviewees to those at institutional sites responsible for campus safety and to interview students whom she felt were at risk of not being included in the survey. So, though admittedly "ruling texts" are needed to organize and provide structure, it is vital that inherent to feminist pedagogy is an approach that critically examines how text confines (even text that is part of feminist thought, research, and pedagogy) with an eye towards ensuring that effects on those differently positioned are accommodated. In the following section, Dina explains how we engaged in a pattern of self-reflection to understand aspects of ourselves and of the research process as a whole.

### **Self-Reflection Meets Praxis in the Research Process**

A significant part of the feminist research project involved a process of self-reflection. In doing so, we can be sensitized to the influence we have on shaping or

controlling the research setting. As our research project unfolded, we as graduate student researchers were undoubtedly confronted with some important questions and dilemmas. How do we situate ourselves within the research project? How does our presence as researchers within the social setting contribute to or shape the “goings on” of the setting? How do we influence the information that we receive from participants? And, as we will note, this self-reflection posed its own challenges and problems.

Our acquired position as team leaders within this unique Women’s Studies methods course created the first opportunity for us, as researchers and co-learners, to be self-reflexive. One of the first assignments required of undergraduates was to maintain a diary of their research experiences and field notes. The following quote was from one of those undergraduate student diaries:

In my case, I came into the research setting viewing it as a collaborative process. Because Dina is more assertive than other grad students in the class, I found that she took on more work than I expected her to. In other words, I started off seeing Dina as my peer, but then our relationship was transformed once the research process began. (quoted with student’s permission)

Dina remembered reading those few sentences multiple times. She immediately felt both obvious and self-conscious. Simply seeing her name mentioned in the undergraduate’s research diary made Dina question her own actions and behaviors on the research team. Had Dina done something that stifled or silenced the voices of others in the research process? Did her enthusiasm for the project come off as overly aggressive? Did it somehow suppress the ambitions of the other students, both graduate and undergraduate? The student’s quote provided Dina with an opportunity to be mindful of her contributions to the project. Dina felt that ambition and enthusiasm, commonly considered to be positive attributes in any work environment, can restrain the activities of others within the setting. It became immediately apparent to her that all of us, as graduate students, were culpable for our behavior within the research process. Without her knowledge, Dina’s own actions and behaviors within the research project had undoubtedly impacted her co-researchers.

This self-reflective practice also provided Dina with the opportunity to craft solutions that might minimize her effect on the project and her co-workers. In other words, if students saw her as too assertive then how could she continue to approach the project enthusiastically, but avoid stifling undergraduate voices, or at the very least ensure that undergraduates weren’t “put off” from the project? One solution that Dina came up with was to simply be honest with students and explain that her enthusiasm was not meant to negatively affect the actions and thought process of her team. By coming forward with this raised awareness of her effect on the team’s spirit, Dina found that students warmed up to her a bit more. They saw that she recognized her enthusiasm, which might be taken as over aggressiveness, and sought to remedy this.

Self-reflection within the research project was also a consideration when interacting with research participants in general. Even establishing initial contact with potential participants needed to be included as part of this process. Dina noted that she and several undergraduates were originally responsible for the “interpersonal level” of

analysis. Part of their responsibilities was to secure interviews with various campus representatives. Specifically, they were concerned with the ways in which Cultural Center representatives and the leaders of student-run initiatives experienced issues of safety on campus. Dina's group as a whole believed that requesting interviews would be fairly straightforward. Of course, they were mindful that people would have specific scheduling needs and conflicts, but they believed that those they contacted would have a vested interest in a project that sought to uncover important information regarding our substantive topic at hand. However, Dina's group quickly found out that this was not always the case.

Megan, one Cultural Center Director (out of several dozen that Dina's group originally contacted) did not respond to Dina's emails or telephone calls. At first, Dina thought that Megan was just too busy, or that she simply forgot to reply. Dina discovered, however, that this was far from what was actually occurring. The director found their very contact for the interview to be contentious. Megan expressed to Deric her feelings. More specifically, Megan claimed that by reaching out to her particular Cultural Center for the purposes of the research project, specific researchers were not helping the cause of her Center in any substantive way. In fact, the director understood our interest in the Cultural Center to be essentializing that population of students. The following passage is from Dina's field notes regarding the experience:

When I saw Deric in class today, he communicated to me that Megan had answered the email that he sent her on Friday within several hours of his sending it. I felt slighted, as I had sent her an email a week ago, and still have not heard back from her. The professor recommended that I phone the director, which I did on break. In my voicemail message, I reiterated that I knew she was busy, and that I sent her an email earlier in the week. I also gave her my email address and home phone number, in case it was more convenient for her to call me.

During class, we determined that since it was relatively easy for Deric to establish contact with Megan, he should initiate contact with her about being interviewed. This is the email that Deric sent to her this evening:

Hey Megan,

I just wanted to drop you a line and thank you for the help today! We'll be there Friday to interview Sandy. Are the Tuesday and Wednesday hours good for next week to interview Jennifer as well? No one could do the interview this week.

Also, would you be willing to talk with us at some point? Some of the other research groups are trying to get interviews with the people in charge of the cultural centers...

Thanks again!

-Deric

Deric had said something to me the other day about him getting the sense that Megan felt certain members of the University community were fetishizing (specific) students, in that they would come to her Cultural

Center (or to other Cultural Centers) looking for their perspective. Apparently, this has happened so often, that she allowed Deric to interview the students of her Cultural Center “on the clock” (i.e., the work-study students). It is very generous of her to have done that, but perhaps it’s preventing her from responding to my email requests – she could simply be tired of getting such requests.

If she did not have that experience, Dina would never have considered the ways in which simply asking for an interview could be construed as objectifying a specific population. Another interviewee, Corrine, the head of another campus Cultural Center, felt similarly when asked about the needs of people using her Center. Corrine cautioned against painting her group in a monolithic light, and to acknowledge that there were far more ways in which the members’ needs were different and unique. In other words, members of traditionally underrepresented groups (women, people of color, GLBTQ) are often essentialized, and the directors of the various Cultural Centers were sensitive to these particular issues.

Additionally, since Megan failed to communicate with Dina, but chose instead to speak with Deric, we also questioned the ways in which Dina’s presence, in particular, constrained Megan from participating in our research project. Without self-reflection, it might have been easy to dismiss Megan’s lack of response as a lack of interest or enthusiasm for our class project on campus safety. We suspect that Megan believed Dina, and possibly others, were objectifying and essentializing particular groups on campus in a way that she believed Deric was not, although we are not sure of why this could be the case.

This tendency to objectify research participants does not simply disappear once one has secured access to them. Indeed, avoiding objectification remains important at all times, including when the researcher interacts with the participant, as well as when the researcher interacts with the data that arises from interactions with the research participant. Sprague (2005) asserts that this is a concern that researchers need to be mindful of—specifically stating that “...standard practices for interviewing also put interviewees into the position of being objects of the researcher’s direction and manipulation” (p. 126). In other words, the researcher shapes the project, and therefore the subject’s input, by asking specific questions, in specific ways, within specific settings. Williams (1996) cautions researchers to be mindful of the fact that interactions between researchers and informants are occurring within “the overall field of power relations” (p. 73). For our project, this “field of power relations” changed with each interaction within the field. At one moment, we might have been interviewing undergraduate students, while at another moment, we might have been interviewing a congressional representative. This shifting within the interview process marked a change, not only in power dynamics, but also in the ways we perceived our dual positionality as students and teachers/researchers. On certain occasions we may have been viewed as having power in a situation when, for example, a graduate student interviews an undergraduate student. In another situation, we may have felt that our interviewees had power over us, such as, when we engaged in interviews with police officers, firemen, and congressional representatives.



These frequent shifts in power dynamics and ruling relations placed us in dual positions and often times it was difficult to manage these volatile changes. As with our dual positionality in the course, as students and quasi-instructors, we crafted strategies to cope which spilled over into the classroom. To address these concerns and dilemmas, the researcher, and teacher, must be self-reflexive and “continually try to figure out the power implications of who they are (or better put, how they are being construed and by whom) in relation to what they are doing, asking, and observing” (Williams, 1996, p. 73). Hsiung (1996) refers to this state of continual self-reflexivity within the research setting as a “constant negotiation” (p. 122) between both researchers and informants within the existing power structure.

Thus far, researcher sensitivity to their personal effect on research interactions seemed to be an important measure in constructing a feminist research project. However, sensitivity to the research setting and the researcher’s effect on that setting also espoused its own set of dilemmas. At first glance, it appeared that being receptive to the delicate balance of the research setting would be a positive phenomenon, in that one would attempt to limit the effect that he or she has within the setting. But that, in and of itself, can also be problematic, at least from a researcher’s perspective. Sprague (2005) speaks about the effect that visibility has on research subjects, but this awareness is easily applied to the researcher as well. In short, knowing that one’s actions and behaviors are being monitored makes individuals scrutinize his or her own behaviors—in other words, he or she may simply stop acting naturally, and start acting—period.

### **Locations, Positions, and Multiple Subjectivities**

We all occupy, encompass, and balance multiple subjectivities. These subjectivities, or different pieces of ourselves, are informed and shaped by the multiple roles we perform: as students, mothers, friends, daughters, teachers, and researchers. Subjectivities help us to filter reality and they structure how we come to understand others and ourselves. Additionally, they are regulated by external factors such as discourse and language. Unfortunately, our subjectivities were not always complimentary and often meshed in contentious ways. However, as Bloom (1998) notes, simply because our subjectivities are “nonunitary,” it does not make teaching impossible; rather, teaching strategies become all the more diverse because our nonunitary subjectivities challenged us to create ways of managing these tensions and thus added to our repertoire of coping mechanisms. Our “trial by fire” provided some necessary classroom strategies to grapple with these nonunitary subjectivities and in this section we demonstrate how engaging with feminist methodology allowed us to come to grips with, and accept, the multiple subjectivities we encompass. This recognition, in turn, had positive spillovers for the classroom setting.

As graduate students in an undergraduate class acting as quasi-instructors, we were immediately placed in a predicament. We had to guide those who were no more than a few years apart in age (for most of us) while simultaneously succumbing to the demands of a required graduate course. Concurrently occupying these distinct positions led to many internal tensions throughout the research project—we dealt with the stresses of academic life as students while also having contributed to other students’ stress as

group leaders. We wanted to be liked as classmates, but not taken advantage of as advisors. We wanted to impress our instructor but not come across as arrogant.

Further, academic life is only one position we occupied throughout the course of this project. Many of us are married, have children, families, and hobbies that do not coincide with university life. At times, in the words of Smith (2005) “the two subjectivities, home and university, [can] not be blended” (p. 11). For example, our school life demanded a lot of time which could mean being away from our family and home. Conversely, family emergencies meant that we had less time to devote to our research, which may have negatively affected the end products we produced. Oftentimes, paying attention to one role more than the other came across to students, mentors, or even loved ones at home as favoritism and, in turn, this created even more internal tensions. Each position and location we encompassed uniquely shaped our judgments and ways of thinking. As such, the different roles we performed during this research project shaped the multiple subjectivities we were forced to balance. Reconciliation of these manifold subjectivities was not easy.

Institutional ethnography demands that we as researchers be accountable and present in the work we perform. This accountability and presence allows the researcher to acknowledge their biases and prejudices while also allowing the reader to know who the author is and why the author has taken up the specific research project at hand. Throughout the semester we kept daily journal records of our research findings as well as recording our own personal experiences with the research process—our frustrations, successes, and questions. Although there was a power imbalance between the graduate students and the professor, we also met after class with her to vent and discuss (some, but not all) group problems; in a way, such meetings acted as a form of consciousness-raising, as we realized we were all dealing with similar dilemmas—some of which stemmed from the varied subjectivities we inhabited. This awareness contributed to our learning a distinct form of pedagogy that rejected conventional, abstract, gender-neutral, gender-biased, and objective social science practices by forcing us to insert ourselves—our strengths and weaknesses—into class work and teaching. Our engagement with feminist methodology demanded that we be accountable and recognize *why* and *how* our multiple subjectivities interacted as they did. This accountability, in turn, spilled over into teaching practices, such as recognizing that what we said to our undergraduate group members was not always clear, that our actions may have conflicted with our words and led to group confusion, and that our ideas were always in flux, which made it difficult to establish timelines and delegate tasks. Once we came to this recognition, we in turn became more accepting of others’ inconsistencies.

For example, one of Laura’s group members, Lucy, did not have a consistent attendance record. Often she was late to class or did not show at all—but there was always a good excuse for this tardiness or complete absence. Engagement with feminist methodology provided Laura with the necessary tools to identify with Lucy and recognize that while school work was one important aspect of Lucy’s life, so too was making the most of her senior year, attending to unfortunate and untimely family situations, as well as working a part-time job to financially support herself. In this case, Laura’s experience with feminist methodology informed her pedagogical approach to working with Lucy. Just as there are many ways to “do” feminist methodology, so too were there multiple ways to communicate with Lucy. Instead of getting angry, Laura

constructed other ways to reach her, such as contact through email, phone calls, or out of class meetings.

Laura also tried to place herself in Lucy's shoes. In doing so, she was forced to confront how her own subjectivities often conflict in ways that were not satisfying to others. Laura came to recognize that everyone occupies multiple positions and this required her to employ a degree of pedagogical sympathy and creative thinking. If she herself was not a perfect student, how could she expect others to be?

Additionally, after reflecting on her own undergraduate experiences, Laura remembered just how difficult it was for her teachers to motivate students to come to class and remain interested. She remembered how hard it was to balance undergraduate school life, home life, and work. Not only did Laura find new ways to get in touch with Lucy, but she also realized that by using herself as an example when talking with Lucy (e.g., drawing upon her own undergraduate experiences) this allowed Lucy to better relate to Laura. In general, Laura found that the more human and relatable she came across, the more interested her group members became.

On more than one occasion, Laura felt uneasy about having to report back to the professor about Lucy's initial lack of participation in the class due to her absences and tardiness. Instead of holding these tensions as a result of her dual positions inside, Laura found that another way to get Lucy to understand and relate to her was simply to be honest about her uneasiness. By explaining to Lucy that she didn't want to be dishonest and lie to the professor about her attendance, but also understood how "senior life" could be, Laura found that honesty allowed her to reconcile her conflicting positions and allowed Lucy to see things from her perspective and make changes. Honesty in the classroom generated a climate of trust. And, as Copp and Kleinman (2008) note, "getting students to trust us as fair, unthreatening, yet challenging teachers, is essential for opening students' minds to feminist ideas and offsetting negative images of feminists" (p. 103). Further, as Briskin and Coulter (1992) claim, "feminist methodology is about creative and transformative ways to engage in research and this practice must extend into the classroom;" (pp. 247-250) Laura's experience with Lucy demonstrated that reaching students might mean relying on unconventional teaching tactics, particularly when we as graduate students were both the students themselves and the teachers.

The growing awareness that each student in the class possessed multiple subjectivities forced us to diversify classroom curriculum and recognize that there is no one "best" teaching method. During the middle of the semester, our class had a mini-breakdown and it became evident that constant group work, with the same people, was not getting the job done. This mini-breakdown resulted from a number of factors. Undergraduate students became frustrated at graduate students for treating them as so-called "subordinates." Graduate students became frustrated with a number of undergraduates because of a lack of effort and help with class assignments. In general, there were frustrations over not attending to assigned readings every week, such that students felt the time they had put towards reading did not "pay off."

As a form of "critical thinking," our experience with feminist methodology allowed us to identify this downfall and take action (Shackelford, 1992). We came to recognize that not all students learn in the same way. Rather, there are multiple learning styles and our class tried to act on this realization. Instead of doing the same activity each week (one hour of lecture, one hour of group project work and then reading discussion)

we tried to shake things up. We swapped group leaders and changed group composition. This way, no one had to work with the same people week in and week out. Some weeks were more project-oriented and some more reading-oriented. In short, we learned from this mini-breakdown and sought to diversify our approach to class learning and pedagogy. (The decision to make this change was the result of an after class meeting between the professor and graduate students, although the professor ultimately had the final say in approving this change.)

Engaging in institutional ethnography with other students also allowed us to understand how language and discourse control the way we manage our subjectivities and provided important lessons for the classroom setting. Our institutional ethnography regarding campus safety required an extensive amount of interviewing—of students, faculty, and staff. As a requirement, all interviewers were required to make public the notes from the interviews they had conducted, as it would have been impossible to conduct thirty separate interviews with the entire class present. On one occasion, however, the class had the opportunity to bring in two directors from various Cultural Centers on campus. Two student volunteers conducted the interviews for the entire class to witness. Remarkably, when students were asked to reflect on the most important aspects of the interview, few responses overlapped, despite the fact that we had all witnessed the very same event, at the same time, and in the same location. For example, when the class was asked what the most significant aspect of each interview was, one student noted how both interviewees stressed the need for more campus safety funding while another student made light of both interviewees emphasis on the lack of publicity campus safety issues receive.

Despite the initial urge to accuse others of not listening or engaging in selective hearing, our knowledge of feminist methodology demanded recognition of the multiple ways that people come to understand and interpret meaning. As Smith (2004) notes, because language is dynamic and open to interpretation, two people witnessing the same interview can (and did) walk away with very different interpretations about what the interview subject had conveyed. This experience has significant implications for classroom pedagogy. Namely, we, as teachers, must recognize that what we say will not always be taken in the way we intend. Therefore, we must find multiple ways to explore a particular topic. Doing so does not mean that we have to reiterate main points over and over, but that we can use a multiplicity of learning tools—lectures, debate, movies, discussion—to provide students with the opportunity to come to understand the subject at hand in ways that are meaningful for them.

Feminist theory and feminist methodology taught us to regard language and discourse as dynamic, subjective, and always in flux. Thus, the words spoken in our in-class interview were interpreted differently by different students; further, the multiple subjectivities that we as students occupied influenced what we chose to highlight in post-class discussion as well as what we chose to ignore and leave out. That language regulates how our subjectivities are coordinated, and because discourse is fluid and variable, has significant repercussions for feminist pedagogy. At the very least we should be aware of what we choose to teach and what we choose to leave out. We should also attempt to think critically about why we have chosen to highlight a certain topic and not mention another. We also want to critically analyze our choice of words because we know that the wrong choice could lead to classroom confusion

For example, one of the graduate student assignments throughout the semester was to find one or two articles for our undergraduate group members to read, which would ideally contribute to the literature reviews of their final papers. As Laura browsed through the University's library network for potential articles, she found herself immediately drawn to political science journals, as her primary field of study is international relations. In this specific instance, written discourse coordinated Laura's subjectivities such that the political scientist in her took over and she found herself choosing articles taken strictly from political science journals to assign to group members. There was nothing wrong with this action; we were all left to our discretion to pick appropriate articles from any academic journal. However, it was important for Laura to recognize her own bias and explain why she had chosen one article over the myriad other articles about campus safety that could be located in journals ranging from *The Sociological Forum* to *The Canadian Journal of Education*.

Understanding the values, beliefs, and biases we bring into the classroom might help us avoid, as Miller (2007) notes, "participat[ing] in our own fiction of neutrality with regard to our positions at the front of classrooms" (p. 1). Again, we return to the theme of accountability. Because we often prioritize subjectivities hierarchically, it is necessary to be accountable to our students so that we do not convey or teach in a narrow, one-dimensional fashion shaped by our disciplinary location. At the very least, feminist methodology, as an interactive, action-oriented approach, demands a pedagogy that follows suit. At the end of this process, we all felt privileged to have been positioned on the peripheries of the inside and outside of this group project because our positions allowed for a very unique learning experience and perspective on feminist pedagogy. From here, we can then begin to ask how all of these questions affect who conducts feminist research and for whom, and what it means for the difficult task of furthering critical feminist research for people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

### **Developing a Feminist Praxis**

As feminist graduate researchers looking back on our progress during this class, we believe it is important to link together the ways in which different aspects of feminist philosophy and methodology impacted our understanding of feminist pedagogy within the classroom setting. Thus, our overall development of a feminist praxis for this class depended on our ability to flesh out issues related to the insider/outsider dilemma, self-reflection, and multiple subjectivities as well as the ways in which certain classroom phenomena occurred. In the end, institutional ethnography was a highly beneficial method to explore in greater depth for this class.

We believe that a type of consciousness-raising occurred throughout the semester among ourselves and among many of the undergraduate students as Naples and Bojar (2002) discuss in *Teaching Feminist Activism*. By engaging in critical periods of self-reflection and coming to terms with "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988, pp. 579-599), we and the other students involved had the opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which our personal lives are shaped by processes of oppression which commonly remain unnoticed unless we specifically interact with the connection between personal problems and political processes. Thus, our study of campus safety using an institutional ethnographic approach naturally seemed appropriate, as institutional ethnography not

only was formed from the standpoint epistemology of Smith (1987) in *The Everyday World As Problematic*, but also because it intrinsically questions the ways in which institutional and textual forces act upon our lives. In this way, institutional ethnography assisted in consciousness-raising within the classroom, and both institutional ethnography and consciousness-raising as feminist methods and pedagogies can invariably lead to experiential learning within the classroom. As Naples and Bojar (2002) write:

From a feminist pedagogical perspective, the development of critical consciousness provides students with the ability to call into question taken-for-granted understandings of social, political, economic, and academic life. This process of politicization can lead them to develop an “oppositional consciousness.” (p. 14)

By using self-reflective practices, such as understanding our roles as insiders and outsiders within the research process and analyzing our “multiple subjectivities,” we actively engaged in consciousness-raising processes while critically researching campus safety through an institutional ethnographical approach. This situation provided students with a hands-on method for studying the issue of campus safety. As we discovered, this issue contains powerful divisions of oppression. Oppression on a number of institutional and political levels also affected the ways in which people of various sexualities, religions, classes, and levels of ablebodiedness experienced and defined issues of safety on campus and shaped the degree to which many people did not feel safe at all. Thus, not only were we able to study a topic which we felt was important to all of us, but we were also able to understand how consciousness-raising, experiential learning, and institutional ethnography are linked together through feminist pedagogy.

Additionally, the dilemmas we experienced in our unique, acquired positions as students and quasi-instructors demanded that we craft pedagogical strategies reflective of our feminist methodological encounters. For example, we found that conversation steering should signal the teacher that a student either is not comfortable with the material at hand or does not fully understand it. Self-reflection allows the instructor to come to grips with what they might be doing wrong and act to more positively affect the classroom setting. Being honest with students allows them to see things from the teacher’s perspective. Further, using yourself as an example can make you more relatable and draw students in. Just as there are multiple, feminist methodological approaches, so too are there multiple ways to teach students and reach them. Finally, students will not always interpret what you say in the way you intend them to. Therefore, as teachers, we need to craft multiple strategies to really hit a point home. Doing so can generate more student interest and engagement and even get students to “claim their own educations” (Crawley, Curry, Dumois-Sands, Tanner, & Wyker, 2008, p. 13).

We are not naïve enough to believe that all of the undergraduate students experienced this type of consciousness-raising or experiential learning within the classroom. Indeed, we remarked to each other how we sometimes noticed an air of anti-intellectualism in which certain students engaged within the classroom. These students may be more difficult to reach. We are also not convinced that students will always experience consciousness-raising through experiential learning, or understand that group, or even individual action, can lead to an “oppositional consciousness.” Finally, we want

to articulate that even though we as graduate students at the time of this course have engaged with self-reflection within the research process, we are still agents within academia, which in itself is socially contextualized within a racist, homophobic, and sexist environment. Thus, there are definite and explicit hierarchies of authority within the classroom and the institution as a whole. However, we would like to believe that our critical engagement with various aspects of feminist pedagogy through methodology has assisted us in understanding feminist praxis as part of the classroom experience and allowed us to better understand the difficulties that accompany feminist researchers working within a university setting. Like Bloom (1998), we too are writing “under the sign of hope” in that the lessons we learned from the dual positions we acquired as students and quasi-instructors will have a positive impact on our future teaching agendas as well as the pedagogical approaches of others.

### **The Relationship of Co-Authors: Feminist Philosophy Against the Wall**

Notably, feminist concerns over authority, consent, and dual positionality arise even during the reporting phase on learning outcomes, and is part of the lived practice itself regarding feminist methodology. Personally, Lauren noted uneasiness between her role as a feminist and that of a writer. As she was reading over and editing various drafts of this article, she found it particularly difficult to edit much of Rita’s writing; as a feminist, Lauren was aware of the many ways in which white, middle-class women have historically ignored, silenced, or transformed the voices of nonwhite women, rendering their opinions, thoughts, and knowledge invisible within a larger framework of so-called feminist research. In other words, how could Lauren simultaneously be a feminist and change what Rita had written? Would altering Rita’s voice in any way silence her as a black woman and privilege the voice of a white woman? Lauren was able to bridge the contradictions within her own understanding of feminism and voice by letting Rita acknowledge any changes made to her writings/voice, and to give consent to any alterations that she made. In this way, Rita still had complete control over what she wrote and how she wanted to be heard. These types of tensions have and will continue to place the researcher in a specific dilemma—one that has no easy answers.

### **References**

- Bloom, L. R. (1998). *Under the sign of hope: Feminist methodology and narrative interpretation*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Briskin, L., & Coulter, R. P. (1992). Feminist pedagogy: Challenging the normative. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 17(3), 247-263.
- Campbell, M., & Gregor, F. (2004). *Mapping social relations: A primer in doing institutional ethnography*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Copp, M. A., & Kleinman, S. (2008). Practicing what we teach: Feminist strategies for teaching about sexism. *Feminist Teacher*, 18(2), 101-124.
- Crawley, S. L., Curry, H., Dumois-Sands, J., Tanner, C., & Wyker, C. (2008). Full Contact Pedagogy: Lecturing with questions and student-centered assignments as methods for inciting self-reflexivity for faculty and students. *Feminist Teacher*, (19)1, 13-30.

- DeVault, M. L. (1990). Talking and listening from women's standpoint: Feminist strategies for interviewing and analysis. *Social Problems*, (37)1, 96-116.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, (14)3, 575-599.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hsiung, P. C. (1996). Between bosses and workers: The dilemma of a keen observer and a vocal feminist. In D. L. Wolfe (Ed.), *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork* (pp. 122-137). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Miller, M. (2007). Introduction—Teaching in the gaps: Authority, ideology, and identity. *Feminist Teacher*, (18)1, 1-8.
- Naples, N. A. (2003). *Feminism and method: Ethnography, discourse analysis, and activist research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Naples, N. A., & Bojar, K. (Eds.). (2002). *Teaching feminist activism: Strategies from the field*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sandell, R. (1991). The liberating relevance of feminist pedagogy. *Studies in Art Education*, (32)3, 178-187.
- Shackelford, J. (1992). Feminist pedagogy: A means for bringing critical thinking and creativity to the economics classroom. *The American Economic Review*, (82)2, 570-576.
- Smith, D. E. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Smith, D. E. (2004). *Writing the social: Critique, theory, and investigations*. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, D. E. (2005). *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*. New York, NY: AltaMira Press.
- Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Williams, B. F. (1996). Skinfolk, not kinfolk: Comparative reflections on the identity of participant-observation in two field situations. In D. L. Wolfe (Ed.), *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork* (pp. 72-95). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Wolfe, D. L. (Ed.). (1996). *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

---

### Author Note

Laura L. Janik-Marusov, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Fall, IA. Her teaching and research interests include international relations, global health governance, public-private partnerships, human rights, feminist theory, and political economy. Correspondence regarding this article can be sent to E-mail: [laura.janik@uni.edu](mailto:laura.janik@uni.edu)

Lauren M. Sardi, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, CT. Her areas of interest include feminist theory and methodology, sexualities and gender, masculinities, human rights, and deviance. In her



current research she utilizes a multimethodological approach to studying the maintenance of male circumcision in hospital settings in the United States. Email: lauren.sardi@quinnipiac.edu

Dina Giovanelli is currently the Urban Sociologist at Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY. She is fortunate to spend her days teaching, parenting, and writing. Email: dinagiovanelli@yahoo.com

Rita Offiaeli is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut. In 2009, she completed her master's thesis entitled "Shell and Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta: When Corporate Culture Meets Globalized Local Culture - The Complexities of Participatory Development." Her research interests include African Diaspora, Gender and Power Relations, Native Ethnography, Human Rights, and Corporate Social Responsibility. Email: rita.offiaeli@uconn.edu

Deric Shannon, Ph.D., is the author/editor of many books, journal articles, and book chapters, typically on political sociology, culture, and sexuality. Email: propaganarchy@hotmail.com

Copyright 2011: Laura L. Janik-Marusov, Lauren M. Sardi, Dina Giovanelli, Rita Offiaeli, Deric Shannon, and Nova Southeastern University

#### Article Citation

Janik-Marusov, L. L., Sardi, L. M., Giovanelli, D., Offiaeli, R., & Shannon, D. (2011). From tactics to praxis: Learning feminist pedagogy through methodology. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(6), 1517-1539. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR16-6/janik-marusov.pdf>

---